

Not in my name will the Human Rights Act be abolished

image: http://thirdforcenews.org.uk/images/uploads/articles/91783/hra_cropped__wide.jpg



The slogan of anti-war campaigners has been borrowed by those trying to protect the Human Rights Act, writes Carole Ewart

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“Not in my name”, forever associated with opposition to the Iraq war, has a new home in the campaign to defend the Human Rights Act (HRA).

Many people in Scotland want to distance themselves from the UK government’s proposals to abolish the HRA, replace with a narrower bill of rights and potentially abandon the European Convention on Human Rights. Question is, does Scotland’s civil society have the resources to convert the sentiment into a coordinated campaign of opposition?

The UK, like it or not, must fulfill its position as a human rights standard bearer so that it has the authority to challenge the plethora of systemic human rights abuses that go on daily in the world.

Writing my blog from Geneva, I am graphically reminded of this after sitting through a session of the UN Human Rights Committee where NGOs and individuals recounted the arrest and torture of judges, intimidation of journalists and lawyers, violence with impunity by the security services against civil society and the public and the terrorists who deny us the right to life.

image:

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Carole Ewart

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The world unites and acts through the UN and we need, indeed expect, our government to show its outrage by using its standing at the UN to take on such countries. But its reputation will be diminished, undoubtedly, if it chooses to abandon the collective approach to defining and remedying human rights. Lots of countries would like to follow and replace home grown approaches which promise an easier ride.

Even before the general election the Human Rights Consortium Scotland (SHRC) got anxious about the result and decided its next conference would address the question “what next for human rights”. Last week a range of people suggested answers and delegates discussed.

Allegedly the government is now attempting to buy off opponents within its party with deals for constituents, suggesting a real zeal in delivering this daft and dangerous policy. However cabinet secretary for human rights Alex Neil assured delegates that SNP MPs were not seeking a deal so their opposition to repeal is steadfast. He announced plans to hold roundtable discussions with colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland to get a coordinated response.

Alan Miller, chair of the SHRC, speculated the proposals could be for a bill of rights on reserved issues resulting in a two tier system of human rights protections in Scotland: a new narrower UK one for reserved issues and the current system for devolved matters.

Ultimately discussions came down to resources as civil society has traditionally been weak on dedicated, domestic human rights activism hence the closure of the Scottish Human Rights Centre in 2005 and the weak funding position of the Human Rights Consortium Scotland.

Perhaps the UK government senses that people, like some MPs, see this as no big deal as long as we are left with some human rights protection. No! We need change practice in Scotland so that people enjoy the benefits that human rights can bring to our everyday lives. Achieving that must be the focus of our action, as well as opposing abolition of the HRA for all our sakes.

Carole Ewart is the coordinator of the Human Rights Consortium Scotland and the convener of the Campaign for Freedom of Information in Scotland.

Read more at <http://thirdforcenews.org.uk/blogs/not-in-my-name-will-the-human-rights-act-be-abolished#QJ1FmKEkMcfx6KVt.99>